

[Transcript] Stolen Hearts / Listen Now: Hooked On Freddie

Hello, my name is Becky Milligan, and I'm dropping in to tell you about a new podcast from Wondery. It's called Hooked on Freddy. It's a strange tale about a man, a wild dolphin, a bitter rivalry, and the weirdest allegation, which spirals out of control. It begins in the late 80s when a depressed grey town in the north of England has a wild visitor, a bottle-nosed dolphin. He's like a ray of light. The locals in Amble love him and name him Freddy. Freddy loves them all, but his favourite playmate is Alan Cooper, a committed animal rights activist. Alan and the wild dolphin swim together for hundreds of magical hours, far out to sea, and a beautiful friendship is born. But when Alan is accused of something unbelievable, disturbing, he finds himself at the centre of a tabloid scandal that grips Britain and ends in one of the most bizarre court cases in legal history. I'm going to play you a clip, and if you want to hear more, search Hooked on Freddy wherever you get your podcasts. September the 28th, 1990, it's a fine day in Amble, a small coastal town on the tip of northeast England.

But we're not in the town. We're about a quarter of a mile out, in the North Sea.

A man's in the water, wearing a wetsuit with yellow arms, and he's just hanging there, alone.

His name is Alan Cooper. And at first, yes, he is all alone, but then

something dark moves at speed under the water, circles, disappears,

and then resurfaces. Now we can see him. It's a wild dolphin, a bottle nose,

and he wants to play. He twists onto his side, inviting Alan to take hold of his dorsal fin.

He will start to dive, just go straight down for about 20 feet,

and then come swiftly back up,

and you'd both explode out of the water. It was just, oh, this world, you know.

I was in this time, and I like it. It's just something special.

That's what I'm, 10 hours, I think it was on the day.

You know, if you could bottle that feeling and sell it, you'd be a millionaire.

Then Alan hears something in the distance, a boat coming towards him. It comes close, and the people on board are looking at him.

He tries to ignore them. I carried on my swim.

The boat just stays there. Alan's being watched. A voice is raised. There's something off here, something very off. The boat stays near him for half an hour, just watching.

Then it leaves.

Alan hasn't heard what was said, but later he'll wish he had,

because it's the before and after moment. What's said on that boat will make Alan wish he'd walked away after his first swim with the dolphin. It'll lead to a bitter rivalry, a rivalry with another man, a man who also claims to be a lover and protector of animals.

And it will put these two men on a collision course. Little did I know what was going to develop. I would have ended it there, and then it's just not worth it, is it?

Over the next year, his face will be splashed across tabloid newspapers and TV shows.

He'll be ridiculed and laughed at. He'll be abused in the street, and he'll even receive death threats.

What was said on that boat will become a national scandal. And for Alan, it will change everything.

It took an absolute unique experience, probably a great experience of my life,

and turned it into one of the worst. What happened to me, you know, never goes away, does it? Would never go away.

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